

# Tough Topics—Conscience

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Date: 05 October 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the first of four sessions on tough topics for the year.

! I've really grown to love this series. We did it last year was our first round and we said, man, there's enough tough topics to fill these buckets for a while. So what we decided to do is have a recurring series on tough topics and just fill it with things that we know would be helpful to you. So this is the first of four for this month. Today, we're going to be jumping into the topic of the conscience. The conscience. What is it? How do you train it? And how do you love those that differ?

So this is the first. I encourage you to come back. We're going to get into the deep end of the pool and the next few as well. Really helpful content. So let me pray. Ask for the Lord's help and we'll get started.

Lord, we want to pause and recognize our need for you. I recognize my need for you. Dealing with weighty things and things that can be confusing.

[ 1 : 12 ] Lord, I pray that you give us grace to hear from your word and grace to live in response to what we hear. Pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.

How many of you guys have been to one of the pumpkin farms like Mayfields or Guthrie's? Have you all been to either of those? OK, so for the pre-K at the school.

Well, they do a field trip and each year either me or Elizabeth will go with whatever kids in school to the field trip. And we've been going to Guthrie's. That's where they do their field trip.

And we always do the hayride and have a whole lot of fun. They play in the corn and all that kind of stuff. Well, at the end, you get a complimentary pumpkin to take home and all the kids get their pumpkin.

They bring them home. They pick one out on the hayride. They pick one out, one that's beautiful. So we've been doing this for a few years. And then we finally got the opportunity to go as a whole family, not just like one kid and a parent.

[ 2 : 12 ] We took all six of us to Guthrie's, got the tickets, the family tickets. We got in there, had the hayride. We're having a blast. And on the hayride, we get out, everybody picks up their pumpkin.

And then we get back to the front. The hayride's over. And then we got a lot of fun still left in the day. So we can't be carrying these pumpkins around. So we decide, let's just go put the pumpkins in the car.

Then we'll come back and then we'll play the rest of the day for a couple more hours. So all of us have our individual pumpkins. We carry them out to the car, put them in the car, come back in. And as we're coming back, we look up and we see this large line.

And it's comprised completely of the people that were on the hayride with us. And we're looking over and like, why are they all standing in a line right there? And all of them have their pumpkins in their hands.

And as we're studying it, we're coming back in. We're getting ready to go back into the pumpkin entrance. And we realize that these people are paying for their pumpkins.

[ 3 : 11 ] That's what they're doing. They're having a transaction at a counter and then walking with their pumpkin to put it back in their car. And all of a sudden it dawned on me. My whole family is a group of thieves.

All of us. There's six of us. It must be genetic. We're all thieves. We're standing there with these pumpkins. We just stashed them away in our vehicle. So what we thought was a freebie and included in the price, all of a sudden, in the blink of an eye, we look up and bam.

Right and wrong set in. Now we have suddenly transported from happy freebies to thievery. And that, my friends, is a picture of the conscience in action.

It is provoking us. It's telling us something is right or wrong. I have to hear the rest of the story.

Yeah. Oh, the rest of the story. That's right.

So there's options here. We could be like, well, we just didn't know. You know how it goes. You play the, you'd be like, well, I didn't know. Or I could pretend I just didn't see it.

[ 4 : 16 ] I'm glad you asked that because I didn't mean to tell the rest of the story. I was wondering. This is the whole time. Is our pastor a thief? What else is he stealing? I didn't see those pockets. What do you got in there? Yeah, I'm glad you said that.

So we just left. I can't arrest us all. That's what we said. I learned that in a gangster rap song when I was a kid. No, I'm just kidding.

So we did. We picked up the pumpkins and we all trudged our way back in and we set them back out. We told the lady, we're like, I'm so sorry. We thought these were free. And all of our kids are like, wait, we can't have the pumpkins.

You know, like they're so distraught. We put the pumpkins back. We got pumpkins later. Don't worry. The kids are okay. They're spoiled. They're spoiled rotten. You don't have to worry about them. So anyways, our conscience directed us and we obeyed our conscience.

So that was good news. Thanks for asking that, Jana. Clarify. So today we're going to be talking about what is the conscience? How do we train it if it can be trained? And then how do we interact with those who differ from us with their conscience?

[ 5 : 17 ] So when you look at the New Testament, there are 30 occurrences of this Greek word for the idea, the concept of the conscience. So it's all over the place in the New Testament.

And just to save you the legwork, I'm going to give you the distilled version of what the definition is. It's on your paper. But what I'm going to be talking about primarily is from this book, which I highly recommend.

It is called Conscience, subtitled, What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ, which is the structure of what we're talking about here. It's by Andy Nacelli and J.D. Crowley.

So I highly recommend this if you want to go deeper into it and see all the nuances of this. It's in here. So what is it? Their definition, the way they define the conscience, the conscience is your consciousness of what you believe is right and wrong.

Your consciousness of what you believe is right and wrong. So conscience really, it can produce different results for people. Based on different moral standards.

[ 6 : 27 ] I mean, just think about like a pro-abortion advocate. They talk about abortion as if it were a civil rights issue, right? It's a positive good. It can be a positive good. But their standard for determining that, determining right and wrong, their standard for that is actually immoral to begin with.

But their conscience is tuned to that. So conscience can change. It can be adjusted. It can be shaped. It can be purified.

It can be cleaned. It can be conformed. There's so many words that are used to describe what can happen to the conscience. So it produces different results for people based on different moral standards.

It can change. And the conscience can function as a guide. And it can function as a monitor, witness, and judge. If you think about a guide, guides like looking forward.

Their conscience can do that. It can look forward to something. Urge you to do something right. The little angel and demon appear on the shoulder like in the cartoons. What should I do in this situation? What should I do going forward?

[ 7 : 28 ] And you have this guiding kind of thought process. Warns you not to do wrong. It urges you to do right. It also can be a monitor or witness or judge.

It looks backwards to things that have already occurred. Things that have happened. And it can say, well, you were right in doing that. Or you were wrong in doing that. It can confirm or condemn those actions.

So Acts 23.1. Is this on your paper? Acts 23. Is that on there? This is Paul talking about his conscience. And it's fascinating because he's looking at a council who are accusing him.

And Paul says, Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day. Which is a fascinating thing for him to say.

Because he persecuted a bunch of Christians before. How can he say, I've been in good conscience up to this day? My whole life. I've lived in good conscience. He used to be a persecutor and a murderer of the church.

[ 8 : 30 ] How could he say something like that? Well, it's because even when he persecuted Christians, he did it with a clear conscience. He was obeying the standards of right and wrong that he believed.

So he did these things. Even though they were wrong and immoral, he did it with a clear conscience. So it's important that we can distinguish those things. Okay, so basic definition. The conscience is your consciousness of what you believe is right and wrong.

Now, the question is how to train it. How do you train it? That's our next big category. How do you train your conscience? Well, your conscience, it can rightly guide or condemn you.

So we got to have that category. It's not always wrong. It's not always right. It can rightly guide or condemn you. Just think about unbelievers. And think about when I was an unbeliever.

Just having this weight of guilt about things that I did. I see this trail of things that I did. I did not have a clear conscience. I knew I was sinning. I knew I was doing wrong things.

[ 9 : 35 ] Even if my brain wasn't adjusted, the standards was not adjusted to Scripture. I still had categories for like, this is not right. Look at the devastation I'm leaving behind me.

So John MacArthur, this is a fascinating quote from him. He said, The wisdom of our age says, guilt feelings are nearly always erroneous or hurtful.

Isn't that interesting? The wisdom of our age says, guilt feelings are nearly always erroneous or hurtful. Therefore, we should switch them off. The conscience is generally seen by the modern world as a defect that robs people of their self-esteem.

Far from being a defect or disorder, however, our ability to sense our own guilt is a tremendous gift from God. See what he's saying? Like kind of the air we breathe culturally is, Hey, it feels good.

Do it. Don't let anybody tell you otherwise. Like there's not a problem with you. There's a problem with everybody else. They are the ones that need to adjust. But one of the reasons that pops up so often is because we have these triggers in our mind, don't we?

[ 10 : 43 ] Even before we were Christians, we have triggers in our mind saying this ain't right. We got to do something different. And he's saying that's a gift from God, even in an unconverted state.

So what is it that we should be telling unbelievers? Only the gospel can comfort a non-Christian with a guilt-wracked conscience. That's the only relief. It's not just lower the bar.

It's to receive redemption in Jesus Christ. A freedom of forgiveness by the God who made you. That's the one thing that can relieve the weight of guilt from an unbeliever.

And interestingly, when you become a Christian, I know Walt said this a number of times. His understanding, his awareness of sin was just like spotlight, like it hadn't been before.

When we become Christians, what happens is it says here like the idea is a supercharged conscience when you become a Christian. I think about my brother-in-law.

[ 11 : 47 ] His name's Eric. I shared this with some of the high schoolers at Brenner the other night. He's a really good builder. He flips houses. It's what he does for a living. Occasionally, I'll have Eric come over to my house and I'm ignorant.

And he walks around with me around the house and he'll just like say, hey, man, you got to check on this or look at these gutters. They're like wonky. It's going to cause drainage issues. It's going to wreck the foundation of your house.

You got to adjust this thing or you got to put in a French drain over here to make sure you're adjusting the slope and make sure the water is going away. He can walk around with me and draw attention to all the things that I didn't see before.

And he's doing it out of compassion and love for me. He doesn't want my house to be a wreck.

Well, it's the same thing whenever Christ comes in a much greater way. When the spirit indwells us, he is shining a spotlight on all these areas that will destroy you that you used to just be nonchalant about.

You used to not care about. You wouldn't pay attention to it. You just did it because it felt good.

Right. And now you have an advocate, a comforter, an encourager that walks around with you. And not only does he just point out things that you really should fix that.

[ 12 : 58 ] I think about my brother in law. He found an area that was having drips into our ceiling from the attic space. And I just had surgery.

And so I couldn't like get on my belly and like crawl back there. And he looked at me. He's like, not only did he point it out, but he said, I'll do it for you because I love you. He even said that. I love you. And he got in there and crawling on his hands and knees to the depths of my attic space where I couldn't get access to.

That's what the spirit does for us. He doesn't just say, well, here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here are all the problems and then just abandon you.

He crawls into the worst spaces with you to draw attention because he loves us. He loves us. So that's what he's doing. That's what he's doing.

He's written the law on our hearts when we become Christians. Jeremiah 31 says that. So he supercharges our conscience. All of a sudden, there's an awareness that wasn't there before. [13:57] David Nasselli, I think I have this on your paper. However, only the cross can fill that ever widening gap between your consciousness of what you ought to be and your actual obedience.

You'll notice as you grow as a Christian, you realize, dang, I'm really missing the mark here. I'm not as good as I thought I was. The more mature you get, the more awareness of your sin you have and your obedience.

You're like, OK, I'm trying to obey. I'm trying to learn to obey in these areas. But you become more and more aware and there's this ever widening gap as a Christian. But as you mature in your faith, you grow increasingly in love with Christ and his gospel.

You cherish it even more. You place your trust more and more in Christ to make you acceptable before God. And you wait with greater and greater anticipation for the day when Christ will come back and make your obedience match your knowledge.

Long for that day. Long for that. Be free to be done with sin, be done with all the shortcomings and all the things that hold us down here.

[14:58] We're going to be done with that someday. I love that song when Satan tempts you to despair. Come thou fount. It's a wonderful.

You could substitute the word conscience in there for Satan. Your conscience can condemn you. It can tempt you. It can accurately point out wrong in your life. But whenever the despair comes, we've got to remember the refrain of the gospel.

The refrain of the gospel is not just, I'm a huge sinner. The refrain of the gospel is, I also have a great savior. So when your conscience accuses you, rightly, we run to the cross.

We run to the cross. So both unbeliever and believer, the remedy is the same. Run to the cross.

Run to the cross where your hope is found, where relief from a guilty conscience can be overcome.

All right. So that's rightly condemn you. But your conscience can wrongly guide and condemn you as well. It can wrongly accuse you.

[15:59] I was thinking of this scene from The Office. And a long time ago, Michael and Dwight are driving in a car. And they're on this road trip. And they're watching the GPS.

And the GPS hasn't been updated. And so Michael's like, I've got to obey the GPS. No matter where it tells me to turn, I'm going to turn. So they turn on these back roads and end up in a gravel road that becomes grass.

Dwight's saying, no, no, don't follow it. I don't think this is right, Michael. And he's like, I must obey it. I must obey the GPS. And they end up like driving into a lake and submerging their whole car and have to abandon the car.

And they're screaming. And it's a big chaotic scene. Well, your conscience can be like that. It can be uncalibrated. It can be unupdated. It can lead you astray.

It actually can cause damage if it's not rightly updated. Singing about 9-11 terrorist attacks. Did they think that was right or wrong? We know what we think.

[16:55] But what did they think? You look at the transcripts and some of the messages left behind, even before the terrorists hit the towers, they thought they were doing something just and good and upright and instilling righteousness.

It's miscalibrated. I saw this article about this pastor, Jamie Coots. He was in Kentucky. He crossed the board back and forth between Kentucky and Tennessee.

He was bitten by a venomous snake during a Sunday service. They were snake handling. His family carried his unconscious body back to their house. And they refused help from the EMS.

They had the anti-venom serum. And they refused it. Why? Because they believed that the Bible taught he would live if his faith was strong enough. And he would die if his faith was not strong

enough.

He died. He died later that day. It's a miscalibrated conscience. It's devastating. The effects are devastating. So the question for us is, well, should we listen to it?

[17:57] Or should we change it? Which one? Should you listen to your conscience or should you change it? Well, the answer to that is it depends. That's not a cop-out.

It really does depend. And I'm going to tell you why. There are three ways your conscience is formed and informed. One way is that it becomes sin-hardened.

Your conscience may become more hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. I realize that my family has stolen all the pumpkins from Guthrie's.

And I say, well, meh, they've got enough pumpkins. They have a whole patch of pumpkins. They're going to miss these six, really? And I just insist on ignoring my conscience in that moment.

It can become sin-hardened. I become indifferent to that reminder. This is wrong. This is stealing. It's not really stealing. I justify it. It's not really stealing.

[19:01] Sin-hardened is a way that it can be formed or informed. The second way is that it can be formed or informed by people following. People following. Your conscience might follow the standards of other people that are just around you.

Your standard for what you should or should not do, what is right or wrong, can be informed primarily by your culture, by your friends, by your family, spiritual leaders even.

Like we have a lot of sway. And so we want to be sensitive to that. But we are not the ultimate authority. God is our ultimate authority. So we got to be careful. What is informing our conscience? What is right or wrong in a different different situations? And then the third category, your conscience is formed and informed, is it can be truth-conformed.

Your conscience might conform more to truth, especially to the truth of God's word, what's revealed in Scripture. Famously, Martin Luther, if you remember the story, is esteemed as essentially the father of the Protestant Reformation.

[20:10] And his beef was with the Catholic Church. Not the church per se. He loved the church. But he wanted to see reformation from the inside out because there were two authorities being held up.

And they were contradicting each other. Is it the authority of the church or the authority of God's word? Which one should we listen to in these matters that are matters ultimately of life and death? And so at the Diet of Worms, he was demanded to recant all of his writings. The Catholic Church was saying, you've got to recant. And he refused to go against his conscience.

And I have the quote for you on here. It's an amazing quote. It says, Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other.

My conscience, here's the conscience, my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.

[21:22] God help me. Amen. Intense. Very intense. But this is a man that I think is holding up a right principle for us. We want to generally abide our conscience, the barometer of right and wrong internally.

And particularly whenever it's captive to the word of God. So it's good to check it. What is my conscience actually captive to here?

If it's a question like this, two authorities being held up. I want the authority of the word of God to have dominance, to have dominance. So the key question for us here is, what is your conscience tuned to?

You know, calibration is tuning an instrument with a standard to make sure that it's functioning accurately. Like that GPS, for instance.

I always think of tuning like my acoustic guitar a number of times. You know, you're twisting that thing. If the strings are really old, they can just pop. You get all kind of dusty and eventually get brittle and they pop.

[22:26] But I've also had an issue where using a tuner, you can plug it in and get more accurate reading and tune it up quickly. And it ends up being more beautiful.

But I've had a situation where I didn't realize it, but my tuner, the machine, was actually calibrated to a ukulele. Someone had switched it over to like ukulele mode.

And I didn't know. So I'm cranking my guitar strings and it's saying, you need to put it up. You need to keep putting it up. Put it up. Keep going higher, higher. And it's like, bong! And it explodes. I'm thinking I'm calibrating it, but it's not the right tune.

It's not tuned to the right standard. And so the result is pop strings are like really grossly out of tune strings. You don't want that. And so Come Thou Fountain has this wonderful line in it.

Tune my heart to sing thy grace. What a wonderful line. This is what it's talking about. It's saying, Lord, I want to be tuned to your standard. What you believe is right and wrong for me.

[ 23 : 25 ] So the question for us is, is your conscience theologically correct? Is it tuned to the standard of the Lord? We want to have a posture before the Lord that says, it's yours, Lord.

Everything in me is yours. You have the gate to my heart. You have the key to open it up.

Everything you find inside, it's yours. Tell me what stays.

Tell me what goes. Tell me what's missing. It is totally up to you. That's what we're saying. That's what we're saying to the Lord when we become his children.

Wide open. He's the new real estate manager. Andy Nacelli says on your paper here. We should do what our conscience says until we are convinced from scripture that it needs adjusting.

Whenever obey conscience collides with obey God. Obey God must come out on top every time.

That's what we're that's what we're getting after.

[ 24 : 32 ] Obey your conscience. That's your default setting. But whenever it collides with obey God, if there is a difference there, then obey God's got to come out on top every time.

So how should you do it? How can we tune our conscience to the right standard? Here's a couple of thoughts for you. One is educated with the truth.

We got to inform it with the truth. And I think this can't be underplayed. A regular diet of scripture.

Taking it in. It will strengthen a weak conscience.

And it will restrain an overactive conscience. We can have both of those going. It will strengthen the weak one. And it will restrain the one that's like hyperactive.

An overreactive one. So educated with truth. Get into the word. Just keep getting into it. And get it into you. More importantly. Secondly. Is to use addition and subtraction.

[ 25 : 31 ] I wasn't very good at math. But this I can do. And you can do. You can do this. What it means is this. For instance. Addition. Sometimes we got to add things to tune our conscience.

We got to add biblical commands to our conscience to inform it. Something's missing that should be there. Our conscience can be malfunctioning and misfiring.

Because we've just deeply absorbed a sinful worldview around us. It came from some of these other sources. Views of this age. So I'll just give you a shotgun list of examples.

Of what I mean. Sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend. Before you're married. Having abortions. Gossiping about others. Getting drunk.

All of those. Just as an example. All of those can be done with a clear conscience. They can be. I know many people that do those things with a clear conscience. But there needs to be added biblical commands.

[ 26 : 30 ] To recalibrate the conscience. Because sexual immorality is a sin. It's not. It's not okay. According to God's standard. To sleep with your girlfriend or boyfriend. Abortion is murder.

Gossip is sin. Getting drunk. Is a sin. So those need to be added. Those are God's direct commands. Timeless commands.

That need to be added. But then sometimes there needs to be subtraction. Subtraction from your conscience. Sometimes we need to tune our conscience by taking commands away from it. That shouldn't be there.

Something is there that ought not to be there. For instance. The Pharisees. You remember. They really went overboard. On a lot of things. But one of the things. They added tons of complicated rules.

To God's law. And basically. They kind of built a fence. Around God's law. So it's like kind of. Just in case mechanisms. That they then said.

[ 27 : 27 ] This is. These are just in case mechanisms. But then they became. Equivalent to God's laws. So. Jesus called these. Commandments. Commandments of men. And he was not.

Not shy. About criticizing. The commandments of men. Jesus took. Took those things. And just. Railed on those extra fences. For example.

One of the ones. That they. Placed up. Was this hand washing rule. If you look. The commandments of men. Segment. In the. In the gospels. He was. Jesus was attacking them. Pushing back on them. About this hand washing rule. They made it. A must. For ritual purity. That's what the leaders. Insisted on. And basically. Insisted that. Everyone. Follow the purity. Ritual laws. That were really. Only meant. For the priests. Priests. I do. All of us. Got to do it. This is important to God. Everybody has to do it. And so. Jesus called them out on this. [ 28 : 24 ] And he. He said that. This was a. Man-made rule. That just made people. Hypocrites. It made them hypocrites. Because they were focusing on looking clean on the outside. Instead of actually being pure on the inside.

That's what he was really after. So it unnecessarily bound the conscience of the people. They were laws that needed to be subtracted.

From their conscience. They didn't need to be. Under the weight of these things. I'll give you another example. I grew up in a household where. Essentially my family is teetotalers. Which means that. There's just no alcohol. At all in our house. And so. I grew up with this kind of like. And I didn't say it was sin. But it was kind of like. Just assumed.

Like if anybody had a beer in their refrigerator. I was like. Oh man. Those people. You know. They were. Off in the deep end. They weren't real Christians. They weren't mature Christians. Like we were. So they never would have said.

[ 29 : 22 ] My parents would never have said that. So I certainly wouldn't throw them under the bus. At all. But I just kind of grew up with that. Assumption. And. My conscience was bound by that.

And so. I remember a friend of mine. After we graduated from college. She came by. I hadn't seen him in a couple years. And he said. Hey man. I'd love to get together. I was like. Yeah. That would be great. I'd love to catch up. Hear what the last five. Seven years have been like. He said. Yeah. Maybe we can grab a burger and a beer sometime. And the first thing out of my mouth was. Oh. I don't drink. I was like.

What? That was the very first thing. I could think of. To say. To my friend. I hadn't seen him in five to seven years. Was I don't drink. Like. That was the most important priority. In the conversation. And. It kind of caught my attention. Because I was like. Why did I. Coil and step back a little bit. I thought that. That was the highest priority.

[ 30 : 15 ] In the conversation. As my default. But he wasn't inviting me. To go and just get. Like. Stupid drunk with him. That's not what. The invitation was. It was to. Eat a hamburger. And hang out. And catch up on life.

So. How should I think about that? I'll just give you. A way that I process through it. And you can agree. Or disagree with me. But. The material world.

Is. Amoral. The things around us. This chair has no morality to it. It is inherently neutral. It's just atoms. We can say that about everything in the material world.

That's inherently neutral. Alcohol in a cup. Is just atoms. It's inherently neutral. So. You see in scripture. That alcohol. At times can be a good gift.

That is encouraged. And. And held up as a wonderful good thing. Psalm 104 15. Wine is to gladden the heart of man. He didn't say water. Even water is good for you.

[ 31 : 11 ] But he held up this. Particularly said. This gladden is the heart of man. John 2. Jesus' very first miracle. It was not grape juice. It was. It was wine. He was keeping the party going.

This. This jubilant feast. Even at the risk of other people overindulging. Jesus kept the party going. But that wasn't what his driving motivation was.

He wasn't thinking. Oh I better not do this. Because it's a slippery slope. And I'm going to get everybody drunk here. Or even one person drunk. That wasn't. That's not even articulated. In that passage. It's a. It's a beautiful thing.

Held up as a celebration of this wedding. First Timothy. Paul encourages Timothy. A pastor. A junior pastor. Who's being trained. To drink it medicinally.

All right. So you have all of these like. Okay. There's some like. Good things here. But then on the other side. It can be used for immoral purposes. On the other side.

[ 32 : 06 ] Ephesians 1. Do not get drunk with wine. It's the same substance. They're talking about. Glavis are a man. Don't get drunk with it. It's also in the Bible. Proverbs 23.

You see this. This person that's like. Obsessed with drinking. All they want to think about. All they want to talk about. All they want to do. Is just drink. To excess. They start to see. Strange things.

It says. They act foolishly. Proverbs 31. Kings and rulers. Those that are in leadership positions. That are making judgments. It says. In Proverbs.

Don't get drunk. Don't. Don't fixate on this. To the place where. You're forgetting. What's been decreed. You're. You're responsible. In a unique way. Don't. Don't. Pervert the rights.

Of the afflicted. So. Overindulgence. Is what they're talking about. It can. Impair judgment. And justice. There's things at stake. Moral things.

[ 33 : 01 ] That are at stake. With that position. And so. I look at all of these. These texts. We have to. Hold these things together. Right. And what we're getting after. Is the question.

Of the heart. What does the heart do. With this substance. What does the heart do. With pop tarts. What does the heart do. With soda. There's so many other things.

That are amoral. Neutral. Atoms in a cup. Or atoms. Wrapped up. In a wrapper. These are not the problem. The problem is the heart. The question is the heart. What is the heart.

Is it. Is it responding. In gratitude. And thankfulness. To the Lord. Is it not getting drunk. Is it not overeating. Right. These are. These are the questions. Of the heart. So drunkenness. Is a sin.

That's explicit in scripture. Drunkenness. Is a sin. But to drink alcohol. Seems to have. Room for nuance. And. A range. Of personal positions.

[ 33 : 57 ] Based on conscience. So. I don't need to push my position on you. You don't have to push your position on me. This is a. This is a place where there can be. Agree to disagree on things.

We have different standards. And that's okay. Getting drunk. I'm going to come after you. And we're going to talk. And I want good for you. That's different. Right. Do you see what I'm saying? Does that make sense? Okay.

So. What are some other issues? That's just one. This is tough topics. Let's. Let's throw out some other ones. How to treat Sundays. What are you supposed to do on a Sunday? What does rest. Actually mean? Should you work.

At all. In the yard. Or otherwise. Listening to secular music. Standards of modesty. Watching particular. Movies or TV shows.

Playing video games. Playing violent video games. Body piercings. Tattoos. Smoking cigars. Birth control. Being overweight. Going into debt.

[ 34 : 51 ] Santa Claus. Bible translations. Schooling options. The list goes on and on. You see? It's a lot of conversations.

But we have to have the conversations in light of Scripture. And respond in conscience. Now finally we want to talk about loving those who differ. Loving those who differ than you with their conscience.

Some of you in here I know have a medical background. You probably have experienced it. If you ever had an injury of some sort. Going to like the ER or walk-in clinic.

And they do a triage. Right? They kind of like scope you out. Try to figure out what's going on. Ask diagnostic questions. What they're doing is they're trying to figure out what is the priority here.

Is this like life and death? Is this critical? If it's life and death. People are rushed back in the ER. To like get after it. And figure out immediately what's happening.

[ 35 : 50 ] Other moderate injuries. You got a cut or a broken bone. But you're not about to die. You might sit in the holding tank for a little while. Maybe a long while.

It depends. And then you might have like poison ivy. Or you might have a scrape. And the priority of that goes down and down and down. There's a difference between a band-aid and a tourniquet.

The needs there. Right? And so that's what we're trying to figure out. Well, in the same way, we have to have some degree of theological triage. Theological triage.

A guy wrote a book called Finding the Right Hills to Die On. I think it's a good category. And we need it. Because not everything is mission critical. Not everything is unilaterally. Exactly the same in priority.

Life and death theologically. And so I have a few different categories for you there on your paper. I'm dividing this into three. It can be divided other ways. But the first kind of category of theological triage.

[ 36 : 51 ] Is this a really important hill to die on? Paul gives us an example. He says, So the Bible is holding up.

It's teaching us that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a doctrine of first importance. And so if we don't believe that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead, then we're not Christians. Like that's mission critical. That's essential for the life of a Christian. So we need to have that category. Second category, there's more. It's not direct gospel issues.

And genuine Christians can differ on these things. Things could be like baptism, for instance. Or church government. How churches organize. The role of men and women in the church and home. We have disagreements. Significant disagreements about those things. But it's not mission critical. Life and death. They can still be genuine believers. We can still be genuine believers. And in the third category, which is where a lot of these disputable matters end up coming in, these issues are neither essential to the gospel nor urgent for the church and the unity of the church.

[ 38 : 02 ] It includes more disputable things like worship styles, Bible translations, and many, many other practical questions like the ones I mentioned before. So we're going to take a look briefly at some controversies in the early church.

Conscience controversies. What were the nature of these disagreements that Paul spoke to? Well, back in the day, Paul's main audience was comprised of Jewish and Gentile Christians.

These two categories. For the Jews, they're coming from these religious backgrounds, this culture with restrictive dietary, holy day laws. So most Jewish Christians carried these in with them to their new belief in the Christian church.

And that strictness in a lot of ways came with them. And for the Gentiles, on the other hand, they didn't grow up with any of that stuff. They were wide open. They were living how Gentiles live. They didn't have the strict background. And so Gentile Christians were often learning healthy separation from their old ways.

So you have these two big categories. And so just briefly, looking at the triage, I can't go into this very long, but Galatians 2 and 1 Corinthians 5 both provide examples where Paul calls out sin.

[ 39 : 17 ] He's saying these aren't just conscience issues. These aren't disputable matters.

Galatians 2, he calls out Peter. This is after he's a Christian. And he calls out Peter for eating with the other Jews because he's like, hey, you're communicating a gospel issue here.

You're saying that there's some kind of hierarchy in the kingdom of God as a Christian. And Gentiles, you can't eat with them because they're not clean enough. They're not Jewish enough.

That's a first level gospel issue. How righteous do you have to be?

How Jewish do you have to be to be made right with God? That's severe. So he calls them out. He says, that's not a conscience thing. It's not a disputable matter. Same thing in 1 Corinthians 5.

On the other hand, it wasn't a restrictive thing. This time it was a permissive thing, an overindulgence. In this case, Paul is calling out a guy that's sleeping with his mom.

His father's wife could be like a stepmom or something like that. He's saying even the Gentile pagans don't do that. That's obscene. And you're saying you're a Christian? I don't think so.

[ 40 : 19 ] That's not a conscience issue. That's what he's saying. So those are two where he calls out people and saying that's not conscience. That's not a disputable matter. These are direct lines, first level triage.

However, he gives an entire section in Romans 14. Romans 14 on disputable matters. On this topic of the conscience on disputable things aren't explicitly simple.

We're trying to figure out where our conscience should be shaped. Disputable matters that concern us today hardly ever parallel exactly with what we see in here, but the principles apply.

And so he has these two categories of strong and weak in faith. And if you have a Bible, I encourage you to scroll there or open to it in Romans 14. We'll look at it here for a second.

Okay. He said disagreements over matters like what to eat and which day to observe, rest on.

[ 41 : 20 ] Paul categorizes these as non-essential issues. They're non-critical for the conscience rather than these foundational issues that he addresses earlier.

So that's what that's the context is questions of should we eat this meat or not? Is this wrong for us? Meat sacrificed to idols. Is it demonic? He says in verse 1, 14, 1, as for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him.

And ones that are restrictive in their observations, welcome him. Don't quarrel over opinions. Only one person believes he may eat anything while the weak person eats only vegetables.

So you see this indulgence versus restriction contrast coming up. So the principle for us is welcome those who disagree on disputable matters. Welcome them. Welcome them.

Don't don't be like, oh, here they come. Vegetable eaters, you know, like restrictive people. Don't don't do that. He's saying welcome those who disagree with you. Verse three, let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats.

[ 42 : 32 ] For God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls and he will be upheld for the Lord is able to make him stand.

So it is what is communicating here is that those who have freedom of conscience must not look down on those who don't. You're fine drinking alcohol in moderation.

That mean you need to be lording it over other people. Like, look at these guys are here. They're so weak in their faith. You know, like that that doesn't serve anybody. That's not helpful.

But on the flip side, it also says those whose conscience restricts them must not be judgmental towards those who have the freedom. So you must recognize that not every line is a clear line in black and white.

And we need to practice some restraint. If we choose not to do something, we don't need to come in and start blasting at other people. OK, so it goes both ways is what this is saying. The priority is welcoming those who disagree with you and not lording it over the other person, whether restrictive or free.

[ 43 : 38 ] Verse five. One person esteems one day is better than one another than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

In other words, each each believer must be fully convinced of their position in their conscience. If you're acting against conscience, that's not that's not a good starting plate place to go against conscience is sin.

If you if you're intentionally choosing something that you feel is wrong, that's sin before the Lord. You want you might need to calibrate it. That's a different category, but you don't go and intentionally sin against your conscience.

OK, verse six. The one who observes the day observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats eats in honor of the Lord since he gives thanks to God.

See, both of them are both of them are aiming at giving honor to the Lord here. And this is the principle. You're seeing what the motivation is for both of these parties is to bring honor to the Lord, to give thanks to the Lord in both the freedom or in the abstinence.

[ 44 : 44 ] Both of them are aiming for that. So the principle for us is assume that others are partaking or refraining for the glory of God. We want to put a charitable construction on people's intentions.

We don't want to assume, oh, man, you know, they're they're trying to they're trying to undermine the church or trying to be sneaky sinners or something like that.

No, let's assume that people are wanting to honor the Lord. That's our goal as Christians, no matter where we are in these different topics. That should be our driving ambition. Verse 10. Why do you pass judgment on your brother or why do you despise your brother?

For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. So the sixth principle is do not judge each other in these matters because we will all someday stand before the judgment seat of God.

There's room for cordial conversation and help. But at the end of the matter, if it is a truly disputable matter, let's entrust it to the Lord. He's going to he's going to be the ultimate judge.

[ 45 : 50 ] Verse 13. Therefore, let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love by what you eat.

You do you do not destroy the one for whom Christ has died. So the principle here for us is your freedom. It may be correct. You might have it calibrated rightly with the scripture and everything might be in order.

But don't let your freedom destroy the faith of someone else. Don't don't don't flaunt it in such a way where, you know, that for them, this seems like a sin. This seems bad.

Don't flaunt it in such a way where it's destructive to another person's faith. That's what it's communicating. So because of the time we're going to expedite this out, I'll just read through these

principles, but I encourage you to go back through it.

[ 46 : 48 ] So number eight, disagreements about eating and drinking are not important in the kingdom of God. Building each other up in righteousness, peace and joy is the important thing.

So we want to keep that category at the top. It's not proving yourself right or getting the debate straightened out. It's loving one another. Number nine, if you have freedom, don't flaunt it.

If you're strict, don't expect others to be strict like you. Number 10, a person who lives according to their conscience is blessed. So we want to abide our conscience.

There's blessing that comes with that rather than searing it and singeing it. And number 11, we must follow the example of Christ who put others first. That was his goal in all of these matters. Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you. So the 12th and final principle is we glorify God when we welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us. I have a whole thing about Halloween.

[ 47 : 47 ] I'd love to talk with you about Halloween because it's a conscience question. I just had someone a few weeks ago asking me about does the church have a policy on this? No, it's a conscience question. And we could discuss about what we think about that or what I think about it.

I'd be interested in talking with you if you're interested in that topic. But here's the main principle for us that I want you to come away with. This is the main principle. The glory of God, the love of brother, and the unity of the church should be the driving forces when thinking about disputable matters of conscience.

Glory of God, love of brother, unity of the church. Those are the big three driving forces in the discussion of disputable matters. Andy Nasseli, I'll leave you with this quote. Christian freedom is not I always do what I want, nor is it I always do whatever the other person wants.

It is I do what brings glory to God. I do what brings others under the influence of the gospel. I do what leads to peace in the church.

That's the driving force. Let's pray. Oh, Lord, we entrust these things to you. Ask that you help us. Give us clarity of mind so we can tune our consciences where they need to be tuned.

[ 49 : 05 ] Throw out the rules that don't need to be there. Add the rules that need to be there that come from your word. Would you help us by your grace to love one another and to live for the good of your church and your great glory?

In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.